

Scottsdale to consider pay increases for police officers



[Beth Duckett](#), The Republic | [azcentral.com](#) 7:16 p.m. MST February 19, 2015



Mounted police officers stand outside INT'L as people were coming out of the bars at 2 am in the entertainment district in Scottsdale.(Photo: Patrick Breen/The Republic)

Story Highlights

- In 2014, Scottsdale did a study that compared its pay for police officers to those in other Valley cities
- The results showed Scottsdale officers don't receive raises as quickly as in the other municipalities
- The City Council could vote on a "step" plan to make Scottsdale more comparable to other cities

Scottsdale is considering spending millions of dollars on pay raises for police officers, a move that could retain officers and prevent other agencies from raiding its ranks.

A plan up for consideration by the City Council could raise the salaries of police officers by up to 5 percent.

The plan could cost Scottsdale roughly \$13.5 million to \$27.5 million over five years, depending on the percentage of the increases.

The City Council will consider the salary increases for police officers in the upcoming budget. The city's proposed budget will be released March 17, covering the fiscal year starting July 1. The council likely will vote on the final budget in June.

Scottsdale's plan would establish "steps" for police pay based on years of service, which would bring stability and make the city more competitive, supporters say.

The council will have a discussion about the step program at a meeting March 3, said Brent Stockwell, Scottsdale strategic-initiatives director.

The price tag, which could be as high as \$4.4 million for the first year, could force the city to make other cutbacks or find new funding sources in the budget to cover the cost. The \$4.4 million represents about 1.7 percent of the current budget for basic services.

The 2014-15 general-fund budget is about \$259.9 million, which is how much the city expects to spend on essential services such as police and other costs. Budget figures for the coming fiscal year are not yet available.

Recently, more Scottsdale officers have left to work for other local police agencies compared with previous years.

Since July 2013, at least 11 police officers have left to work for other local police agencies, compared with two officers who left between July 2009 and June 2013, city figures show.

Scottsdale, unlike many other Valley public-safety agencies, does not have a "step" pay program for police officers, which means Scottsdale officers don't move up the pay scale as quickly as other local agencies, according to the city.

Scottsdale has about 340 police officers. In the city's general-fund budget, police costs make up the largest expense.

This fiscal year, the city budgeted about \$89 million for police services, according to figures in the budget approved last summer.

About \$70.9 million of the \$89.8 million was for police personnel, which includes pay and benefits. The fiscal year runs July 1 through June 30.

Currently, the only way a Scottsdale officer moves up in pay is when the City Council approves an increase, Stockwell said.

At a Feb. 10 study session, the City Council discussed the plan, which could be based on performance.

Officers "want a program they can depend upon, and they don't feel they can depend on what we're doing now," Councilwoman Suzanne Klapp said.

If the council chooses a 5 percent increase, new officers typically would reach the top of their pay range in about eight years, according to the city.

For a 5 percent increase, if officers are less than 5 percent from the top of their range, they would get an increase to the top of the range — but no higher. Officers already at the maximum of their range — \$79,664 — would not receive an increase.

Scottsdale would divide the salary ranges into eight "steps," and officers would start at the appropriate step based on their years of service. A first-year officer would be placed at the first step (\$57,679) and a five-year officer would be placed at the fifth step (\$70,110), according to the city. No officers would lose pay under the plans being considered.

Councilman Guy Phillips supported a 5 percent increase.

"We can come back to council and we can see if there is going to be a way to pay for that, or what we're going to have to get rid of in order to do that," Phillips said.

Councilman David Smith noted that comparing pay across cities can have drawbacks.

"If everyone in this small group tries to match each other, we end up chasing ourselves," he said.

Jim Hill, president of the Police Officers of Scottsdale Association, said the 5 percent merit steps plan "makes a statement that the Scottsdale Police Department is an employer that is serious about keeping quality police officers."

"For too long, this department has served as a training ground for police officers who then leave for other police departments that offer 5 percent step pay programs," he said.

With a step program, an officer could reach the top of the pay scale faster, encouraging him or her to stay, Hill said.

Hill said the program is "only part of the solution."

Scottsdale, for example, has lagged behind other Valley agencies for pay increases in recent years, he said.

By the numbers

Scottsdale in 2014 completed a study of police-officer pay comparing the city's pay with Chandler, Gilbert, Glendale, Mesa, Phoenix and Tempe. The city gathered data from other municipalities.

Salary paid for transfer officer with five years of experience:

Scottsdale: \$54,933

Glendale: \$57,872

Chandler: \$58,661

Mesa: \$59,301

Tempe: \$64,230

Phoenix: \$64,501

Gilbert: \$66,685

Average salary for police officers:

Glendale: \$64,278

Scottsdale: \$66,741

Chandler: \$69,048

Phoenix: \$71,037

Salary increases for police officers in Valley cities, by fiscal year:

City	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Phoenix	12.15%	4%	5%	6%	5%	5%
Gilbert	None	None	None	19.6%	5%	5%
Chandler	4.15%	None	5.83%	None	5%	5%
Glendale	None	None	3.91%	3.72%	5%	5%
Mesa	-2%	None	2%	5%	5%	5%
Tempe	None	-5%	None	5%	5%	3%
Scottsdale	-2%	None	None	2%	2%	3%

SOURCE: City of Scottsdale.